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## ABSTRACT

A study followed three textbook adoption committees as they evaluated basal reading programs. The committees used "A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs" (developed at the Center for the Study of Reading) to help them evaluate the quality of instruction in existing programs. Case studies of the three committees sought to address the following issues: (1) whether the Guide was helpful; (b) whether it helped committee members focus on the instructional content; (c) whether it influenced teachers in becoming more critical consumers of basal materials; and (d) whether there were factors which contributed to the use of the Guide. All committee members were asked to read the booklets in the Guide and were observed as they used the Guide to evaluate programs. Members were asked to fill out questionnaires to find out whether the Guide was of help and to determine whether it helped them focus on the instructional quality of the basal reading programs. Structured interviews followed classroom observations to determine if teachers had changed their thinking or teaching behaviors. Results showed that 80% of the committee members felt that the Guide was helpful. Research indicated that use of the Guide improved the selection process by giving members information about current reading research, by providing specific criteria for evaluating basals, and by giving committee members a common framework in which to understand what they were evaluating. The extent to which the booklets helped teachers become more critical consumers depended upon each individual teacher's level of prior knowledge and training. Four factors appear to have contributed to the Guide's successful use: time, enthusiasm of committee members, in-service training, and leadership. (Three tables of data are included, and 27 references are attached.) (MG)

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# CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

Technical Report No. 478

## IMPROVING THE TEXTBOOK SELECTION PROCESS: CASE STUDIES OF THE TEXTBOOK ADOPTION GUIDELINES PROJECT

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### Abstract

Although basal reading programs are widely used in American schools, research focusing on how these programs are selected by textbook adoption committees is both recent and scant. This study followed three textbook adoption committees as they evaluated basal reading programs. The committees used *A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs* to help them focus on the quality of the instruction in the several basal series they examined. Results suggested that adoption committees can be assisted in selecting a basal reading program based on a set of common criteria for evaluating instructional quality. Textbook committees were most successful when they had adequate time and training to evaluate basals and when they had appropriate leadership and enthusiasm for their task.

## IMPROVING THE TEXTBOOK SELECTION PROCESS: CASE STUDIES OF THE TEXTBOOK ADOPTION GUIDELINES PROJECT

Basal reading programs are one of the most ubiquitous aspects of reading instruction in contemporary American classrooms. Studies during the last 25 years indicate that teachers use basal reading programs as the main source of reading instruction in 95% of elementary classrooms (Austin & Morrison, 1963; Jackson, 1981). Other studies have revealed that many teachers also use and follow closely the teachers' manuals that accompany these basal textbooks (Duffy & McIntyre, 1982; Durkin, 1984; Hodges, 1980; Shannon, 1983; Woodward, 1986).

Recently, however, researchers have identified a number of problems with basal textbooks and their accompanying teachers' manuals and workbooks. Davison (1984), for example, has demonstrated the adverse effects of readability formulas on the comprehensibility of basal textbooks. Bruce (1984) and Anderson and Armbruster (1984) have identified problems at both the macro- and microstructural levels in the narratives and expository articles contained in these texts. Osborn (1984) has identified problems with workbook tasks while Beck, McKeown, McCaslin, and Burkes (1979) and Durkin (1978-79, 1984) have described numerous problems with the directions in teachers' manuals.

These studies, as well as the research on reading processes during the past decade, indicate the need for substantial changes in basal reading programs. Translating this need into reality, however, is a difficult process fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, the publishers of most basal programs have been reluctant to make research-based improvements because they believe that the impetus for such changes must come from the textbook adoption committees which actually purchase these materials (Dole, Rogers, & Osborn, 1987; Squire, 1985). These publishers contend that major changes in basal programs will not be accepted by the teachers who use the programs, an argument which is supported by research which demonstrates that teachers on textbook adoption committees tend to select new programs that are most like their old ones (Powell, 1986). The great irony of this situation, as Farr and Tulley (1985) have suggested, is that textbook adoption committees often do not have sufficient background in reading or training in the evaluation of basal materials to demand the kinds of changes consistent with recommendations based on recent research and practice.

It is with these contradictions in mind that a series of booklets have been developed at the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois to help textbook adoption committees evaluate basal textbooks. The booklets, entitled *A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs*, were written to upgrade adoption committee members' knowledge about recent reading instruction research and to help them evaluate the quality of instruction in existing basal reading programs. The *Guide's* purpose is two-fold: In the short term, to serve as a tool that teachers can use to evaluate critically the reading programs from which they now have to choose and, in the long term, to create more knowledgeable educational consumers who will push publishers to produce better reading programs.

The *Guide's* effectiveness is the subject of this report about three separate adoption committees. Each of these case studies sought to address the following issues: (a) whether textbook adoption committee members perceived the *Guide* as being helpful in the textbook selection process; (b) whether the *Guide* helped committee members focus on the instructional content of textbooks; (c) whether the *Guide* influenced teachers in becoming more critical consumers of basal materials; and (d) what factors contributed to the likelihood that adoption committees would use the *Guide* and find it helpful. It should be noted that while various aspects of the selection process will be discussed and a general description of the procedures each of the three committees followed will be given in the following pages, a study of the entire selection process itself lies outside the scope and purpose of this study.

## Background to the Textbook Selection Process

To understand the need that the *Guide* fills, it is necessary to understand something about the textbook selection process itself. Until recently, the selection process has not been a topic of research. During the last decade, however, researchers have begun to look carefully at the process of how textbooks are selected. In particular, Farr and his associates (Courtland, Farr, Harris, Tarr, & Treece, 1983; Farr, & Tulley, 1985; Farr, Tulley, & Rayford, 1987; Powell, 1986; Tulley, 1985) have begun to study how textbook adoption committees go about selecting one basal reading program from among the 16 programs that are currently commercially available.

Findings by Farr et al. (1987) and others (Marshall, 1985, 1987) indicate that many factors come into play during the process of selecting basal reading programs. These factors include: the presentations made by the publishers' representatives, the leadership on the selection committee, the amount of time the committee has to make a choice, the committee members' training and expertise, the amount of administrative support the committee receives, and community participation in or influence on the selection process (Glenn, 1987; Winograd & Osborn, 1985). Because so many factors often enter into the decision-making process, the goal of selecting the textbook of the highest instructional quality frequently becomes obscured.

The fact that instructional quality frequently takes a backseat to other considerations may be traced to the nature of the textbook selection process and to the background and experience of people who sit on the adoption committees. The selection process often entails a committee's working with a checklist or evaluation forms (Powell, 1986). Although these evaluation procedures differ from district to district and from state to state, there are many commonalities. Many checklists, for example, include criteria for evaluating the physical appearance and utility of basal programs (Comas, 1983; Courtland et al., 1983). Comas found that 73.1% of the checklists she sampled included items about illustrations. Many checklists also include criteria for evaluating the social content of textbooks, for example, sexism, racism and stereotyping. Squire (1985), a publisher, listed a host of such specifications which are now required by most states for all basal reading programs.

These checklists, however, frequently lack criteria for evaluating the instructional quality of basal programs. In her examination of the textbook selection process in two districts, Powell (1986) presented data about how two textbook adoption committees evaluated textbooks. The evaluation checklists used by Powell's districts are fairly representative of those used by districts around the country. (See Comas, 1983, for a review.) An examination of the checklists reviewed by Powell (1986) reveals some of the problems and weaknesses inherent in most such checklists. For example, one of the problems Powell identified was the fact that these checklists promoted the widespread use of the "flip-test," whereby evaluators thumb quickly through the book looking briefly at the pages. When she asked several committee members what they were looking for when they used the "flip-test," they were unsure. One said, "I just know I take this book . . . and I do this (flips pages), if those pages are too busy, I set that down for a while." Another committee member commented, "I guess (I look) just to see if it appeals to me, or you know, if I would be interested in it" (Powell, 1986, p. 328). These and other similar comments from the two committees she studied led Powell to conclude that such practices encouraged, at best, a superficial review of basal programs.

Another major problem with the use of these checklists is that they rarely encourage evaluators to focus on the instructional quality of the basal textbooks they are examining. One of the checklists in Powell's study, for example, can be completed without ever critically examining the method of instruction used to teach comprehension skills, phonics or vocabulary. And, even when checklist items do focus on reading curriculum or instruction they are often phrased in such a way as to be open to a broad, rather than a specific, interpretation. As a result, for instance, the committee members in Powell's study interpreted the items on their checklist very differently. When asked what they looked

for as they evaluated comprehension instruction, they indicated diverse criteria such as "harder vocabulary words," "critical comprehension skills," "comprehension questions, activities, and exercises," and "lots of practice pages in the workbook and skills sheets for comprehension . . . context clues." On the basis of such comments, Powell (1986) concluded:

The obvious result of these data is that most of these teachers did not have a good understanding of reading comprehension; therefore, it was impossible for them to know how to judge the comprehension strand of instruction in a basal program. (p. 292)

## Introduction to the Case Studies

### The Guide

The evidence, then, suggests that basal reading programs are often not chosen on the basis of the quality of the instruction in those programs (Farr, Tulley, & Powell, 1987). *A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs* was developed to help teachers select basal readers upon the basis of current reading research and exemplary practice rather than upon the basis of peripheral considerations. (See Dole, Rogers, & Osborn, 1987, for a complete description of the *Guide*.) The *Guide's* developers wanted it to: (a) help adoption committees understand the issues involved in effective reading instruction; (b) delineate what committees should look for when evaluating the content and instructional quality of basal reading programs; and (c) provide a procedure that would help committees both to analyze effectively the content of programs and to record their findings. They also hoped that the *Guide* would provide adoption committees with the knowledge base they needed to make a case to publishers for improved reading programs.

*A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs* consists of several booklets and a *Leader's Manual*. Each booklet discusses a specific topic important to reading instruction. Three booklets had been developed when the *Guide* was used in the three case study districts. These booklets were on the topics of vocabulary, workbooks, and comprehension instruction. The vocabulary booklet was developed first and served as a prototype for the rest of the booklets. This booklet will be described in detail to illustrate the organization and content of all of the booklets. Each booklet contains three sections: Research and Practice, Guidelines, and Evaluation Procedures.

In the Research and Practice section of the vocabulary booklet, textbook evaluators are provided with summaries of current research about vocabulary acquisition and instruction. Three major approaches to the teaching of vocabulary in basal reading programs are then described and evaluated. How each approach can lead to different levels of word knowledge and affect comprehension is discussed and examples of more and less effective instruction are provided.

As each approach is explained, a guideline is presented. For example, the guideline about what to look for when evaluating the contextual approach follows a discussion of that approach:

*When a basal program uses a contextual approach, look for:*

- *instructional contexts in which sentences provide enough context clues for students to accurately figure out the meanings of words.*

Following the research and practice section is a list of all the guidelines that appear in that section.

The evaluation procedures follow the guidelines and suggest how evaluators can determine how well the guidelines are met in a program. The vocabulary worksheet provides space for comments on the

vocabulary activities in a particular lesson. Evaluators analyze which approaches to vocabulary the program uses and for each approach make a judgment about the quality of the instruction. For example:

*When a program uses a contextual approach, evaluators must ask, "Do the sentences provide enough context clues for students to figure out the meanings of words?"*

## Methods

### The Three Sites

The three adoption committees we studied were not selected randomly. All three committees shared a number of characteristics. First, these committees were located in districts in "non-adoption" states, that is, in states that did not require districts to choose from a state-approved list of recommended basal programs. Second, these districts were not representative of the full range of geographic or demographic distribution of districts in the country. Third, these districts could be described as well-motivated districts, in the sense that they sought technical advice from the Center for the Study of Reading to help them in their selection of a basal reading program.

**Site A.** The first textbook adoption site studied was located in a suburb of a major city in the Midwest. The adoption committee consisted of one teacher from each of the seven schools in the district and was lead by the district's reading coordinator. The committee used the booklets over a period of 9 months, beginning in May and ending in February when it made a final decision on the basal program to be adopted.

The committee at this site used its own procedures to screen basal programs and reduce an initial list of eight programs to three programs. This task was accomplished before the *Guide* was used.

To use the *Guide*, the committee divided itself into three groups. Members of each group read one booklet (either the vocabulary, workbook or comprehension booklet). The group then met with Center staff who demonstrated how to use the worksheets to evaluate the three programs they were considering. Each group worked on the worksheets and Center staff members observed them and took field notes.

During this initial training session, committee members were able to evaluate two basal programs at one grade level. They evaluated the rest of the materials in their own homes and together in their committees. When the groups completed their work, the committee met as a whole. Each group presented an oral report summarizing how the different topics were handled in each of the three programs. The entire committee then rated and ranked each program on each of the three topics.

**Site B.** The second textbook adoption site was located in a Western town about 1-1/2 hours away from a major city. This school district looked upon the textbook adoption process as part of a larger effort to change and improve reading instruction. The district had embarked upon a year-long staff development program that was coordinated with the choosing of a new basal reading program. A group of 50 district personnel (including a principal and a teacher from each school in the district), participated in these coordinated programs. The group was led by the district's curriculum coordinator. The district began its staff development program in June, and worked through the next academic year before making a final selection of a basal program in April.

This adoption committee began the textbook selection process with a week-long in-service training program designed to provide committee members with new information about reading instruction. Center staff members provided the in-service training to this group using information from the *Guide*.

All committee members read the vocabulary, workbook and comprehension booklets as part of their in-service training.

In the fall, 7 of the 50 principals and teachers were chosen to be team leaders whose task was to train the rest of the committee. Center staff trained this smaller group in the use of the booklets, and observed them as they evaluated two basal programs. The smaller group then led the rest of the committee members through the evaluation process in a series of meetings held over a period of several months. The larger committee broke into small groups, with each group evaluating workbooks and vocabulary and comprehension instruction in several basal reading programs. Group members rated each topic in each program, and then the committee met as a whole to discuss their evaluations. Basal programs were eliminated one at a time, until a final decision was made.

**Site C.** Adoption committee C was located in a small Midwestern town. This committee used the *Guide* during an academic semester, beginning in October and ending in January of the next year. The committee was led by a district curriculum coordinator.

This particular committee had worked with the Center staff the previous academic year, providing us with critiques of early drafts of the booklets. When Center staff began working with committee members in the fall of the following academic year, they had narrowed their selection down to four basal programs. They decided to have selected committee members pilot these programs in their classrooms. At the same time, committee members read the *Guide* and evaluated the programs they were piloting. The committee's leader felt that the combination of piloting and use of the *Guide* would provide detailed information about the strengths and weaknesses of the programs they were evaluating.

This particular committee was not trained by Center staff in how to use the *Guide*. Staff members met with the committee on three different occasions. Each time one booklet was given to committee members. They were asked to read each booklet and then complete the worksheets on each of the two programs they were piloting in their classrooms. All of this work was completed independently by committee members. Monthly meetings were held and committee members met by grade levels to compare notes and to come up with evaluations and ratings of each topic for each program based on the worksheets and on the piloting. In January, all of the evaluations were presented, and a decision was made to purchase two alternative basal programs.

### Data Collection Procedures

Despite our attempt to use the same data collection procedures at each of the three sites, on-site data collection varied from site to site because of the different procedures followed by the local adoption committees themselves. Data collection proceeded as follows. First, all committee members were asked to read the booklets. The Center staff then trained members at Sites A and B (at their request) to use the evaluation worksheets. The staff next observed committee members at Sites A and B as they used the *Guide* to evaluate programs. Field notes were taken of these meetings<sup>1</sup>.

Next, staff gave questionnaires to committee members at all three sites. The purpose of these questionnaires was two-fold: to find out whether the three committees felt the *Guide* was of help in the textbook selection process, and to determine whether the *Guide* helped them focus on the instructional quality of basal reading programs. Once the questionnaires were completed, Center staff conducted follow-up interviews with committee leaders to provide additional corroboration of questionnaire results.

Committee leaders then selected two or three committee members whom researchers contacted for additional data collection. A member of the Center staff observed each committee member in his or her classroom for a reading period. Following these observations, structured interviews were

conducted with each of these committee members. These interviews were designed to corroborate data gathered from the questionnaires and to determine if committee members had changed their thinking or teaching behaviors over the short term.

## Results and Discussion

The results of these questionnaires, observations, and interviews are discussed as they relate to the issues raised at the beginning of this paper.

### 1. Did Adoption Committees Perceive the Booklets as Being Helpful in the Textbook Selection Process?

To answer this question we analyzed the questionnaires given to the members of each adoption committee after they had used the booklets to evaluate the textbooks they were considering for use in their districts. Ninety-four percent of committee members responded to the questionnaire. The individual interviews (conducted with selected members of each committee and with the leaders of all three committees) provided additional information.

The results of the questionnaire responses of all three committees are presented in Table 1. These data show that 80% of the committee members felt that the *Guide* was of use in helping to choose a basal reading program. Table 2 presents more detailed data about why committee members felt the way they did. Almost two-thirds of those who would recommend use of the *Guide* to others indicated that the *Guide's* use made the evaluation and selection of a basal reading program a more educated, systematic and critical process.

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here.]

The follow-up interviews with committee members corroborated these findings. One committee leader commented,

What they [the committee members] got out of it was that in the end they could evaluate basals thoroughly. They knew them inside out when they were done. They did an objective job--they quantified and they felt they could justify their decisions.

Another leader noted,

[The *Guide*] made a uniform judgment about different areas. One that we could even quantify with a number rating. . . . It gave, I think . . . more validity to the study and the number system gave us information that we didn't have before . . . and it made more sense and it was more objective.

Additional evidence corroborating this finding is presented in Table 3. Twelve individual comments were made that the approach taken in the booklets made the evaluation process objective, systematic and thorough.

Table 3 provides other information about why committee members felt positively about using the *Guide*. Committee members often remarked that the *Guide* provided committees with research-based information about reading instruction, a finding corroborated by one committee leader during a follow-up interview:

What I found, as exciting as you can get in curriculum I suppose, was that the [teachers'] judgments reflected the background of information that the *Guide*

provided. They were made in terms of that background information. I think that it raised to a higher level the discussion about what was important in our reading selections.

[Insert Table 3 about here.]

One-third of the committee members, however, gave only a qualified "yes" to their positive recommendation for use of the *Guide*. These respondents focused on some of the factors which they perceived as limiting the *Guide's* effective use. More specifically, they noted that committees using the *Guide* needed appropriate in-service training, interested and enthusiastic committee members, and adequate time in which to use the *Guide* as an evaluative tool.

These questionnaire responses were also corroborated by the follow-up interviews with individual committee members. All three individual committee members interviewed from Site A, for example, commented that they learned as much about reading instruction from in-service training and graduate classes as they did from the *Guide* itself. They also felt that it was this combined knowledge (rather than the *Guide* alone) that enabled them to be knowledgeable enough to evaluate basal programs. One committee member also commented that much had to occur in a district before the *Guide* could be used, an observation echoed by a committee leader: "The background needs to be there. Then they needed some expert (a reading person) to explain things to them and to walk around and help them." Other committee members expressed similar sentiments. One said that districts not only needed a "highly trained and interested group" evaluating the materials, but also needed "to keep other teachers informed and in-serviced." Another committee member felt that a precondition for a district's successful use of the *Guide* had to be a clear sense of what was most important to the district when it evaluated and selected a basal reading program.

Twelve percent of those committee members responding to the questionnaire would not recommend use of the booklets to other adoption committees. Their major criticism was that the guidelines in the booklets did not discriminate among basals. One committee member argued, "If the basals are similar, there's no way to make a decision."

These results suggest, overall, that committee members perceived the *Guide* as being useful in helping them choose a basal program. Committees pointed specifically to the objectivity and systematic analysis of basals that the *Guide* affords. Committee members did, however, have reservations about patently recommending the use of the *Guide* to other basal adoption committees. These reservations centered around the perception that using the *Guide* was a time-consuming process and the belief that committees would have to be committed and well-trained in order to use the booklets.

## **2. Did the Booklets Help Committee Members Focus on the Instructional Content and Quality of the Basal Textbooks They Evaluated?**

Research indicates that most selection committees do not have adequate background knowledge about reading and do not know how to evaluate the instructional quality of basal programs. Data collected during the Guidelines Project indicated that a properly designed worksheet helped some committees transcend these shortcomings. Committee members at all three study sites completed lengthy worksheets in which they evaluated detailed aspects of instruction as identified by the guidelines in each booklet. Their subsequent comments indicated that they were beginning to apply the knowledge acquired from the *Guide's* booklets to very specific instructional features of the basal programs they were evaluating. Their written evaluation reports, for example, included critical comments, supported by specific examples, about vocabulary instruction and the value of prereading activities and the importance of relating the concepts in stories to children's experiences.

For example, comments from written evaluation reports included:

"prereading activities relate concepts in the story to children's experiences"

"suggestions for discussion preceding the story reading relate the concepts in the story to the children's experiences"

"The prereading background is great"

"gives good background knowledge"

"asks questions that build on background knowledge"

"purpose-setting, silent reading, checking and developing comprehension after each page . . . this breaks up the story too much; difficult to grasp important overall concepts"

Committee members used their new knowledge not just to make very specific comments about the quality of instruction they found in the programs they were considering. Interview data indicated that committee members agreed upon the evaluation criteria they were using and that they were identifying the same things. For example, one committee's observation that the questions in a basal program were ". . . wide open, too general . . . there's a whole barrage of questions to ask and no directions for teachers" was seconded by another committee that noted: "There are too many questions overall. In the student reader there were questions, but these were not in the right order and are not relevant to the story." One group evaluating vocabulary instruction in one program reported:

This text uses a conceptual approach, but it is not labeled. The text is dependent upon the teacher. I would like to see more in the manual for those teachers who don't know it. What will be taught is what is in the manual.

(For example) . . . "Plant. One second-grade story is about a plant (a factory) . . . plant is later discussed briefly in comprehension, but not directly. Children are not introduced to the concept of a plant as a factory, though that's what the story is about."

While the members of all three selection committees used the *Guide* to focus on the instructional quality of the basals they examined, the data also indicated that at least some committee members integrated their own beliefs with the booklet criteria for evaluating textbooks. At Site C, for example, committee members commented extensively about levels of questions in the comprehension strand, although levels of questions were not part of the criteria listed on the booklet guidelines. Repeated comments reflected their continuing concerns:

"the level of questioning is good"

"include a good balance of literal and inferential questions"

"most questions ask children to recall details of the story"

"questions following story reading are often inferential, not just literal"

"most of the questions are very helpful and are both literal and inferential."

In sum, evidence from the Guidelines Project indicated that the use of a properly designed tool such as the *Guide* improved the selection process for these committees in several ways. First, by giving committee members important background information about current reading research, the *Guide* deepened committee members' awareness of the problems with many basal reading programs and how they might compensate for these deficiencies in the classroom. Second, the *Guide* helped committees focus on the instructional quality of the programs being considered by providing specific criteria for evaluating basals. Lastly, by providing a structure for organizing their evaluation, the *Guide* gave committee members a common framework within which to talk about and understand what they were evaluating. At the same time, however, it is important to note that there was evidence to suggest that even when a tool like the *Guide* was available, committee members did not necessarily completely abandon their own evaluative criteria. The extent to which and the reasons why committee members integrated their own criteria with the new criteria is an interesting question, and one that certainly warrants further study.

### **3. Will Use of the Booklets Help Teachers Become More Critical Consumers of Basal Materials?**

Although we did not have base-line data about how committee members used basal textbooks before they participated in the selection process, we discussed this topic with selected members of each committee after they had evaluated basal programs. We talked to them about their use of basals in the past, and if and how their thinking and teaching behaviors had changed as a result of the knowledge they had gained from evaluating basal textbooks using *A Guide to Selecting Basal Reading Programs*.

Responses to these questions varied from district to district. District B reported the most specific changes in thinking and behavior. For example, all four committee members interviewed said they had used the comprehension section of the teacher's manual differently than they had the previous year. Several committee members reported they had started to use story maps. "The class caught on immediately," reported one second grade teacher. Three members of the committee reported asking different questions in class because they now paid more attention to sequence and understanding rather than keying in on details. Two committee members also reported using workbooks more selectively. "I pick out what I want to use more now than I did before," said one committee member, while another reported, "Now I don't use all the workbook pages. I skip lots more pages this year. I did sometimes before, but I felt guilty. Now I don't. Now I know it's okay to pick and choose workbook pages."

Responses from teachers at Site A corroborated these general findings. Two of the three committee members said that they were more critical consumers of basal materials. (The other teacher reported that she never used the teacher's manual, either before or after reading the booklets.) One teacher reported that she looked more carefully at the background building section and the purpose-setting sections of the directed reading lesson "rather than taking them point blank." She also said that she now goes over the storyline after students completed reading a selection. Another teacher said her readings over the last 2 years have caused her to teach comprehension differently. She now asks students what they know about a topic of a text, writes down what students say, and then extracts questions from these responses. It is important to note, however, that all three of these teachers had classes and/or workshops in reading before they read the booklets. All three reported that they were already "familiar" with some of the ideas in the booklets. They also had a reading coordinator who led them through the process, and had given them readings on current research in reading before the adoption process began.

Overall, the three teachers interviewed at Site C all reported fewer changes in their thinking or behavior. One teacher said that the *Guide* was "good for those who don't have the background," but that she already knew the information presented in the *Guide*: "I have a degree in reading, so I have

always been critical about these things." A second teacher interviewed also reported having heard a lot of the *Guide's* information before. The third teacher felt that the *Guide* was of little value to her since she taught first grade and was more interested in phonics than in comprehension.

Before we draw any conclusions from these responses, we have to caution that these teachers probably do not represent "average" teachers. They were selected by committee leaders because of their willingness to talk to us and let us observe their classrooms. It is therefore likely that these teachers represented the "best," and their responses have to be interpreted in that light. Nevertheless, their responses are of interest for the light they shed on several points. First, as previously noted, when teachers cited growth in their knowledge about basal reading programs, they did not mention the booklets as the only source of their learning. All of the teachers interviewed identified additional sources--from books and articles to graduate classes to in-services. Second, the extent to which the booklets helped teachers become more critical consumers depended at least in part upon a teacher's level of prior knowledge and training. For example, two sixth-grade teachers from District B reported different kinds of changes in their thinking and behavior after reading the vocabulary booklet. The second teacher's greater depth of understanding of the critical issues discussed in the vocabulary booklet may be traced to the fact that she has a master's degree in reading while her counterpart had not had an opportunity for comparable professional training and growth.

#### **4. What Factors Contribute to the Likelihood That Textbook Adoption Committees Will Use the Booklets and Find Them Valuable?**

Evidence from questionnaires, interviews and written reports suggests that committees at Sites A and B found the booklets to be valuable in the textbook adoption process. Committee members used the booklets, said they were helpful and that they would recommend them to other textbook adoption committees. At Site C, however, committee members' responses were much more mixed and less enthusiastic about the booklets' usefulness in their adoption process. A number of teachers refused to answer the questionnaires and at least one teacher described the *Guide* as a "failure" because of "poor planning, weak leadership, hostile teachers, and a lack of technical assistance" (personal communication).

Four factors appear to have contributed to the *Guide's* successful use at Sites A and B and its lack of success at Site C.

**Time.** Committee members at all three sites commented on the enormous amount of time involved in using the booklets. Committee members at Site A noted that because of the time factor, the process was "not for everyone." The importance of time as a major factor influencing the decisions of adoption committees has been noted by others (Farr & Tulley, 1985). Courtland et al. (1983) found that a major concern of the adoption committee they studied was that committee members perceived themselves as not having enough time to review the materials adequately. A particularly important aspect of the time factor was the presence or absence of release time. Committee members at Sites A and B were given release time to work on their committees. The Site C committee, however, received no release time. The committee had to meet with us at 4:00 p.m. after a full day of teaching. Their reluctance to participate in the evaluation process was compounded by the fact that they were "expected to volunteer" for this project and received no extra pay for their labors.

**Enthusiastic committee members.** Committee members at Site A commented upon the need for and importance of an interested, enthusiastic committee to successfully complete the time-consuming process of looking closely at basal reading programs. This committee appeared to have that enthusiasm. The committee's leader reported that all of the committee's members had "enthusiastically" volunteered for this assignment and that, in addition, at least three of the committee's members were involved in graduate classes in reading. The committee members at Site B were

basically an enthusiastic group as well. Most of the teachers on the committee were characterized by their principals as "master teachers." The leaders of the committee's seven subgroups all demonstrated strong leadership abilities and an enthusiasm for the reading in-services provided by the Center staff.

The Site C committee, on the other hand, did not appear to be as enthusiastic as the other committees. Their lack of interest was evidenced by their arriving late to after-school meetings, their failure to ask questions, their inattentive behavior during meetings, and their failure to complete our questionnaires. One teacher characterized these teachers as "hostile" and argued that she did not think the teachers on the committee saw a need for change. In addition to the factors which contributed to this lack of enthusiasm (in addition to low morale and no release time or extra pay), she noted that some teachers felt that the committee would merely recommend the same programs they had been using for more than 20 years, while others felt that the committee would turn a deaf ear to what they really wanted.

**In-service training.** Committees at Sites A and B had extensive in-service training in reading instruction, along with training in the use of the booklets. Individual interviews with members of both committees indicated that it was their combined knowledge about reading instruction, rather than knowledge gained from the booklets alone, that contributed to their understanding of the booklets' content, to their ability to use the booklets to evaluate basal programs, and to the subsequent changes in their attitudes and behaviors.

In contrast, the Site C committee had no related in-service training or readings, and received no assistance from Center staff on how to use the booklets. Committee members simply were given the booklets, told to read them, and then to use them to evaluate the programs they were simultaneously piloting on an individual basis in their schools. According to one teacher, this absence of internal or external training and assistance left committee members "vague and unclear" about how the booklets were to be used.

**Leadership.** Another factor which seemed to strongly influence the booklets' perceived usefulness was the kind and quality of the leadership available during the textbook adoption process. Committee A had a knowledgeable reading coordinator who took a strong leadership role during the entire adoption process. She was not only decisive in assigning duties and deadlines, but also able to answer questions about reading content and clarify instructional issues when necessary. Committee B also had a strong leader. Although he was not knowledgeable about reading, he provided the adoption committee with the leadership it needed by making use of the services of Center staff. Committee members at both Sites A and B felt that this strong leadership contributed to their successful adoption process.

We have evidence, however, which indicates that the adoption committee at Site C did not perceive their leadership as effective. Committee members pointed out that no administrators served on the committee, although principals and other administrators were perceived as having influence on curriculum decisions. One committee member commented that there was at least some feeling that the selection of basal readers had already been decided upon by the administrators. This sense that the committee not only lacked leadership but also did not exercise much control over the adoption process helps to account for its lack of success in using the booklets to help its members select a basal program.

### Summary and Conclusions

The findings from these three case studies indicate both the *Guide's* usefulness as a tool to improve the textbook selection process and the factors that can encourage or limit its successful use. On the one hand, adoption committee members generally found the *Guide* to be helpful because it provided them with specific criteria which permitted them to focus on the instructional quality of the programs they were evaluating. The *Guide* was only somewhat helpful, however, in assisting teachers to become more critical consumers of basal materials. On the other hand, a number of internal and external factors

influenced just how successful committees were in using the *Guide* to evaluate programs. At all three sites, for example, the *Guide's* success was evident from the fact that it helped committee members to focus on evaluating the instructional quality of reading programs. At Site C, however, several considerations, including time, committee commitment, in-service training, and leadership limited the *Guide's* success.

Determining the extent to which these results may be generalized to other textbook adoption committees in particular and to the adoption process in general means we must consider how representative these committees are of textbook adoption committees across the country. The committees we worked with were, in many senses, very typical of adoption committees nationwide. These committees consisted largely of teachers and committee leaders who varied in their levels of education, their teaching abilities, and their willingness to improve their own teaching. Many had served on previous adoption committees. All were very conscious of how much time they had to commit to the selection process. Over 90% of the teachers on these committees regularly used basal materials, and many were quite satisfied with the materials they used. And, most were not aware of the "comprehension revolution" (Pearson, 1985) and new research in reading.

While the committees we worked with were very typical, they were also very atypical in several important respects. All three had sought assistance from the Center for the Study of Reading and volunteered to work with us. All of these committees were from non-adoption states and from relatively small districts rather than the large, urban districts that account for the vast majority of the nation's students. These districts were also distinguished from others around the country by an underrepresentation of minorities among their student bodies and a lack of geographic variability.

With these similarities and differences in mind, we think we can draw several conclusions about how successful the *Guide* can be in improving the selection process for particular districts. First, the *Guide* can be of greatest help to enthusiastic adoption committees who lack training and expertise in reading, but who are willing to evaluate basal programs and receive district support for putting the time and effort into learning how to use the *Guide*. Secondly, the adoption process can be used very successfully as part of a district's larger in-service training program. In both instances, the variables that will determine the *Guide's* successful or unsuccessful use and the degree to which a district benefits from its technical assistance are the same: appropriate release time, adequate support, and committed leadership.

While one major short-term goal of the *Guide* was to provide technical assistance to adoption committees, a longer-term goal was to create a more knowledgeable market of consumers who would demand better reading programs. At this time we can only speculate how successful the *Guide* will be in this regard. As we interviewed committee members after they had used the *Guide*, we were struck by their tendency to identify a multiplicity of factors that they believed could change their professional attitudes and behavior. We did not ask for this information; committee members volunteered it. This information does suggest that a deep level of processing is required to make the kind of long-term changes in teacher thinking that are needed to create a more knowledgeable market.

Interestingly, all three committees mentioned that textbook publishers should read and use the *Guide* as they develop new basal textbooks. Some committee members even felt that the *Guide* would be more useful for publishers than for consumers. It is unclear, however, to what extent these educational consumers would hold publishers accountable for following the guidelines presented in the booklets. Publishers will certainly argue that accountability will be necessary before significant changes can be made. In the long run, perhaps, what will be required to improve the textbook selection process is some combination of both consumer and publisher action in which each seeks to play "both ends for the middle."

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### Footnote

<sup>1</sup>Since members at Site C used the *Guide* to evaluate programs at home, it was impossible to observe them. However, Center staff were present when the committee members presented their findings and have audiotapes of these meetings and written evaluation reports.

**Table 1****Summary of Questionnaire Responses**

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1. How useful were the booklets in helping you choose a basal reading program?

|           | Not Useful |          | Very Useful |          |
|-----------|------------|----------|-------------|----------|
|           | <u>1</u>   | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u>    | <u>4</u> |
| Responses | 1          | 5        | 14          | 10       |

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Note.  $N = 30$

Table 2

## Responses and Comments Regarding Usefulness of the Booklets

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2. Would you recommend the use of the booklets to other adoption committees?

|             | <u>Yes</u> | <u>Partially</u> | <u>No</u> |
|-------------|------------|------------------|-----------|
| Responses = | 19         | 2                | 3         |

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| Comment                                                                                                      | Number of responses |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| much more educated and careful process                                                                       | 4                   |
| very helpful                                                                                                 | 3                   |
| more critical evaluation process                                                                             | 3                   |
| thorough and systematic                                                                                      | 2                   |
| recommend, if there is:                                                                                      | 6                   |
| commitment                                                                                                   | 1                   |
| appropriate in-service                                                                                       |                     |
| appropriate training                                                                                         |                     |
| appropriate background                                                                                       | 3                   |
| good leader                                                                                                  | 2                   |
| most basals came out with near equal points: choice needed to be based on things not covered in the booklets | 3                   |
| too awkward and long                                                                                         | 1                   |
| publishers should use them more than textbook adoption committees                                            | 1                   |

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**Table 3****Summary of the Responses Regarding the Pros and Cons of Booklet Use**

| Pros and Cons of Booklet Use                                                    | Number of Responses |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Advantages of Using the Booklets</b>                                         |                     |
| • provides committees with research-based information about reading instruction | 9                   |
| • objective approach - "not just, 'this looks good'"                            | 7                   |
| • systematic, comprehensive and thorough process                                | 5                   |
| <b>Disadvantages of Using Booklets</b>                                          |                     |
| • time-consuming                                                                | 7                   |
| • delimitations of the group using the booklets                                 | 3                   |
| • need interested committee                                                     | 0                   |
| • need knowledgeable committee                                                  | 0                   |

**Note:** *N* = 30